

BEST COLLEGE REVIEWS

A GUIDE TO THE BEST COLLEGES IN AMERICA

MENU



THE 25 MOST AMAZING CAMPUS STUDENT RECREATION CENTERS

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In recent years, universities have come to the realization that their academic prestige alone is not enough to attract the world's top students, athletes, and overall academic participants. In an era when students are more mobile and discerning than ever, university officials have gone on a major building boom that has seen designer dorms, stunning libraries, and amazing recreation centers characterize campuses across the country. With the boom in full swing, and athletic programs taking off at major universities nationwide, it's worth looking at the 25 most amazing student recreation centers that America has to offer. We have tried to look at more than just the one building that might be labeled the student rec center in a typical university, instead considering all the recreation facilities, recreation programming, outdoor facilities, and architecture. Any list like this is subjective, of course, but here are our 25 favorites.

25. San Francisco State University



Though it might not be as well known in athletic circles as major state schools elsewhere in the country, San Francisco State University has a lot of good things going on at its main campus athletic facility. The university calls its student recreation center “Gym 100,” referring perhaps to the easy and accessible nature of the gym for students of varying athletic abilities.

Strength training is the primary focus of this main campus gym, which plays host to both the men’s and women’s NCAA basketball teams. The facility also features martial arts practice areas and competition facilities, making it relatively unique among competing recreation centers nationwide. With long hours of operation and a never-ending drive toward expansion of the facility and better organization of its features, SFSU is a serious contender when it comes to student rec centers.

24. University of Pennsylvania



Penn, as it is known, is not often associated with a strong athletic reputation outside of its Ivy League environs. Even so, the campus's 19,000 square foot fitness center, named after alumnus David Pottruck, is one of the most luxurious such facilities on the east coast. Though smaller than many of the fitness centers found at big-name Division I schools, the facility features an Olympic sized swimming pool, a co-ed sauna, high-end juice bars, a golf simulator, basketball courts, and even a climbing wall. The facility frequently hosts group classes and instructional courses as well.

23. University of North Dakota



There are few things as alluring as a healthy lifestyle, and the unique recreation center found at UND is determined to ensure that students pursue healthier habits during their time on campus. In an effort to avoid the “freshman fifteen,” the university has placed its own kitchen in the rec center where students can learn to cook healthy and do it on location after a workout. Meditation rooms and traditional fitness facilities are also featured in this open, amazing recreation center, for the ultimate in “sound mind, sound body” living.

22. University of Wyoming



Wyoming can be a seriously challenging place to live, especially when trying to stay fit during the state’s punishing winters and relatively scorching summers. The University of Wyoming tries to make the state’s climate a bit more amenable for students with its student recreation facility, though. Strength training, indoor swimming, relaxation areas, and a circuit training facility, are all a part of the innovative fitness center found on campus.

And, while the student recreation center is actually quite new and impressive already, campus officials are currently in the planning stages for a half-acre addition to the facility that will culminate in a full overhaul of the entire gym before the expansion wraps up in 2014.

21. University of Chicago



When most people think of the University of Chicago, they probably refer to the old stereotype that the school is far more cerebral than it is intramural. That reputation might be well-earned, of course, but it's worth noting that the University of Chicago has one of the most stunning facilities in the country.

Designed by Cesar Pelli, the campus recreation center combines form and function to be both artsy and utilitarian for students. An Olympic-sized swimming pool can be found here, as can one of the largest strength training facilities among Chicago-area universities. With personal training and group fitness options available, this facility ensures that Chicago's brightest thinkers don't let their late nights lead to unhealthy habits elsewhere.

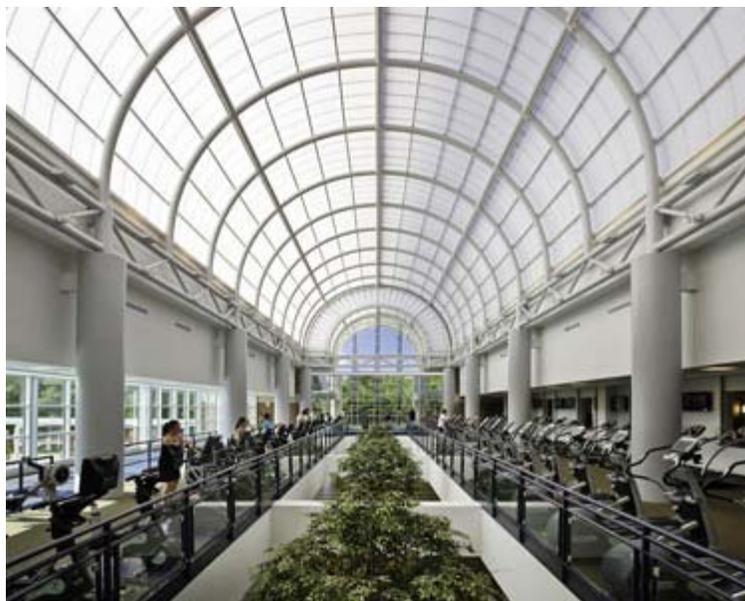
20. Vanderbilt University



The Vanderbilt facility features slightly more than 132,000 square feet of strength training space and practice facilities. Squash courts and racquetball facilities can also be found at this central facility on campus, as can group fitness classes and personal training instruction upon request. The field house is currently being expanded and renovated, and a new multi-purpose facility is being built, which should make Vandy's recreation offerings even better.

Vanderbilt University pairs their indoor facilities with an outdoor recreation area, which offers outdoor facilities and programming, and this is where Vanderbilt really shines. That outdoor facility features everything from athletic practice fields to rock climbing and a standard track. Students can even take kayaking classes!

19. University of Illinois



The University of Illinois takes student fitness seriously, and that commitment can be found in the campus' primary recreation center. The Activities and Recreation Center, known to students as "the ARC," features 340,000 square feet of climbing walls, aquatic facilities, a strength training area, group instruction facilities, and personal training meeting rooms. It even features a sauna and a cafe, perfect for a healthy treat after a long workout.

While the University of Illinois might not be the biggest school nationwide in terms of Division I athletics, it should be noted that the 340,000 square feet of fitness space at the ARC represents the largest such facility in the state.

18. University of Alabama at Birmingham



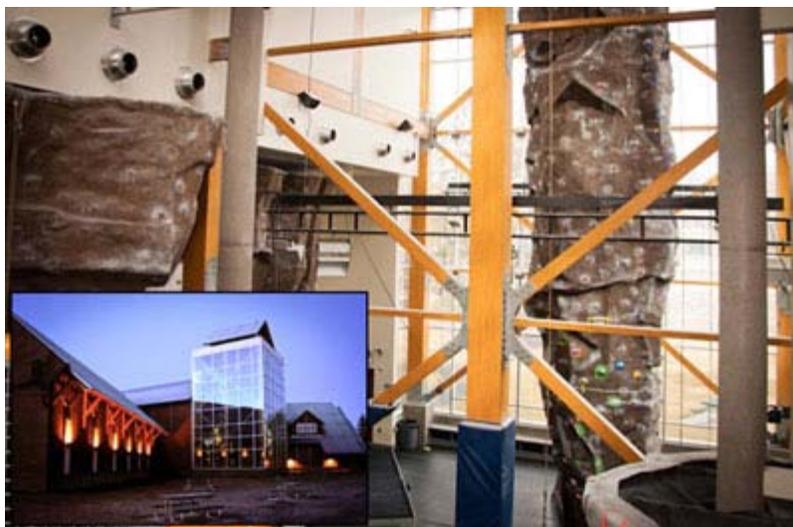
Alabama is no stranger to excellent athletics and fitness, which is why it's no surprise that the University of Alabama at Birmingham has dedicated its 150,000 square foot recreation center to developing student abilities. With squash, racquetball, and aquatic areas, students will find no shortage of things to keep them busy and in shape. Strength training facilities are also offered, as is a PowerZone for serious training and a KidZone for younger visitors who want to get in shape and burnish their credentials for a future Division I scholarship.

17. University of Arizona



The University of Arizona is a football powerhouse, and that's largely due to what the university calls its Student Recreation center. With three basketball courts, a major strength training facility, an Olympic-size pool and a full line of iMacs for fitness research, the recreation center is the right combination of practice and theory for students in all disciplines and sports. Better yet, it's part of a larger fitness campus at the University of Arizona that combines indoor and outdoor fitness routines for the benefit of students in all disciplines.

16. University of Idaho



Built in 2002, the Student Recreation Center at the University of Idaho is one of the university's newest buildings of any kind. It features 80,000 square feet of fitness space for students, making it one of the largest in the state. A climbing center, circuit training platform, and strength training facility, are all offered to students for round-the-clock use. A sauna, massage center, and full locker rooms, are also featured as part of this relatively new, cutting-edge facility.

15. Northeastern University



The Marino Center at Northeastern University is one of the largest buildings on campus, and it operates more like a traditional gym than many of the other recreation centers around the country. The gym is next to the food court, but does offer its own cafe and juice bar for healthier fare. Group classes, personal training, and an impressive strength training facility are all to be found here. Also included are classrooms, meditation space, and basketball courts.

14. University of Akron



Akron is a smaller MAC school, but they punch above their weight class with their world class student recreation facilities. The University of Akron recreation complex is 295,000 feet and features a 56 foot rock climbing wall, a leisure pool, a spa, and a lazy river. So you've got an indoor water park basically bolted onto a killer gym included when you attend Akron. Just the thing needed to wait out the cold Ohio winters.

13. Texas State University



Texas State has all of the normal rec center amenities, like basketball courts, a gleaming weight room, cardio areas, and racquetball courts, but they also have an awesome indoor pool, a rock climbing center and a boxing studio. An incredible lobby with a rock climbing arch greets students as they come to work out or participate in activities. Students have no excuse for not being physically fit at Texas State.

12. Colorado State University



For students looking to work on their fitness, the Student Recreation Center at CSU is a sure bet. The facility is brand new, having been built just a few years ago. It features luxurious interior materials that include natural stone and wood, and sets workouts against a typical Colorado landscape. An Olympic-size indoor pool is offered, as are personal training sessions and a strength training facility that is the single largest in Colorado. With year-round operation and hours that work for student schedules, the facility is almost always packed full of athletes and regular students who are fighting the good fight against the “freshman fifteen.”

11. University of South Florida



The University of South Florida takes full advantage of being located in paradise, with a heavy emphasis on outdoor activities. They offer affordable equipment rentals for camping, and USF Outdoor recreation offers many adventure trips throughout the year from kayaking to beach trips. USF also has a ropes course and a Riverfront recreation park that offers canoeing and

kayaking, as well as a disc golf course.

South Florida also has a beautiful outdoor pool, a heated indoor pool, and a gorgeous campus recreation facility to complement it's awesome outdoor offerings.

10. University of California at Los Angeles



UCLA's athletic reputation and central location make it the perfect place for a state of the art fitness center, and that's exactly what students will find when they enter the campus' John Wooden Center. Three separate basketball gymnasiums can be found here, as well as personal fitness trainers and a full strength training center.

Squash and racquetball courts abound, as do group instruction rooms and meditation areas. The gym employs its own unique brand of personal fitness known as FITWELL, which helps students create a healthy lifestyle both inside and outside of the gym. Because the school has managed to build its own state-of-the-art facility, and create a unique fitness program for students and faculty, it should be considered a serious contender for sports-minded students.

9. Pepperdine University



Like many larger universities, Pepperdine features a veritable campus of recreation facilities that are targeted to students of all interests and backgrounds. It is the Firestone Fieldhouse, however, that stands head and shoulders above the other athletic buildings on campus. The Fieldhouse is known primarily as the home of the university's basketball team, but it features so much more.

In addition to the 3,500-seat basketball arena, a full indoor swimming facility and strength training center can be found on-site. While it's probably most popular among those who play basketball for the school, students of all backgrounds appreciate the tens of thousands of square feet dedicated solely to intense weight lifting workouts and indoor swimming.

8. Temple University



For quite some time, Temple was known as a basketball school with a football program. Recently, though, the school has been powering through Division I play in both sports, while working on bringing up its soccer, field hockey, rugby, swimming, and gymnastics programs. It's all thanks to the Independence Blue Cross Recreation Center on campus, built as part of a partnership with the major northeastern insurance company whose name adorns the building's entrance.

In addition to hosting one of the largest weight rooms on campus, the facility also hosts group classes, personal training sessions, and adapted fitness programs that can accommodate athletes with disabilities and students who wish to overcome their own limitations and achieve new

heights in personal fitness.

Temple also boasts the Pearson/McGonigle complex, which was recently renovated and opened in the fall of 2012. 30,500 sq feet of recreation await students at this modern complex, and it includes a climbing wall and an indoor golf driving range.

7. University of Maine



The University of Maine built its state of the art fitness center with help from New Balance, which maintains its headquarters in the state. The new Balance Student Recreation Center features a pool surrounded by marble tile, a luxurious 20-person sauna, and sweeping strength training facilities. It's a commitment to student athletics that might come as a surprise to many prospective students, especially because the University of Maine is rarely regarded as a powerhouse in Division I sports like many other state universities around the country.

It should also be noted that the New Balance Fitness Center is one of the few such facilities nationwide with a full-sized indoor ice hockey rink. When combined with expansive basketball and racquetball courts, it's easy to see why students are so impressed with what's going on in the University of Maine Department of Campus Recreation.

6. The Pennsylvania State University



There are few schools as heavily invested in the success of their athletic programs as Division I Penn State, where the football program is king and the basketball, baseball, soccer, and gymnastics programs are all quite robust on a regular basis. The campus boasts not just a single rec center, but an entire recreation campus, that can meet virtually every student need.

The centerpiece is known as Rec Hall, an old and storied building that contains two full gyms, an adaptive weight room and fitness center, gymnastics practice facilities for the men's and women's teams, ten squash courts, and 14 racquetball courts. A tennis center, natatorium, and four other buildings round out the recreational campus at Penn State's University Park location, making it one of the largest such collections of facilities in the world.

5. The Ohio State University



For students who like their indoor, Olympic-sized pool to come with a bubble bench and a slide, there is perhaps no better option than the 500,000 square foot recreation center that can be found at Ohio State University. The state's biggest academic institution is also home to the single biggest university rec center in the state of Ohio, and that means good things for students. In addition to the innovative pool, students will find everything from a boulder wall to racquetball courts and an indoor gym.

Ohio State is another university that has its own recreational campus where students can work on their own health and athletic skills both indoors and outdoors. When take all together, the university's commitment to campus recreation is easily among the top ten nationwide.

4. University of Missouri



For this major football school, few things are as important as the full-size indoor football field that can be found at the campus recreation center. That expansive practice facility is paired with traditional student fitness centers, group instruction rooms, and basketball courts. The center is also home to the university's "indoor beach," which is situated by the pool and features a waterfall that operates on a continuous basis.

The University of Missouri has never had a problem attracting top athletic and scholastic talent, but the campus recreation center found on campus might seal the deal for even greater numbers of students. There is, after all, no better definition of luxury than an indoor beach in a state 1,500 miles from the nearest outdoor option.

3. University of Iowa



The University of Iowa might not be the biggest school to compete in Division I sports on the national stage, but that hasn't stopped administrators from creating one of the best student

recreation experiences available. Though the university operates a campus-style student recreation experience, the jewel in the institution's crown is its Campus Recreation and Wellness Center, or CRWC. The facility is essentially brand new, having just opened in 2010, and was designed by the architectural firm RDG Planning & Design.

Basketball and volleyball courts can be found on-site, as can a large gym dedicated to workouts of every kind. Group instruction rooms, classrooms, and personal training rooms, can all be found at the CRWC by students interested in using those options. A full indoor pool and a 25-person spa round out the features found at this facility.

2. University of Texas



The University of Texas actually oversees an eight-building recreational campus that puts it on par with virtually any university in the country. UT has over 500,000 sq ft of indoor rec space, and over 40 acres of outdoor recreation. The centerpieces of this eight-building tribute to fitness and athletic dominance are the Gregory Gym and the Anna Hiss Gym.

Together, these two facilities offer seven basketball courts, an archery studio, dance classes, personal training, handball and racquetball courts, a full-size Olympic swimming pool, and much more. When paired with the remaining six rec buildings on campus, it's no wonder student-athletes here often go into professional sports after graduation.

1. University of Cincinnati



The UC Campus Recreation Center is an impressive building, with over 200,000 square feet of recreation facilities. A juice bar and a convenience store are also available to students for immediate refreshing during or after a big workout. The CRC has three pools, over 21,000 pounds of weights, a climbing wall, and a suspended track. With a heavy focus on swimming and other aquatic sports, the facility is a big bonus in Ohio's nasty winter.

University of Cincinnati has always placed a premium on impressive architecture, and the CRC is an example of this. UC's facilities for student athletes are also impressive. The Richard Lindner building is futuristic looking and is the crown jewel of UC's Varsity Village which includes Fifth Third Arena and Nippert Stadium. The building is wedged into a tight spot between the football stadium (Nippert) and basketball stadium and was built when UC joined the Big East conference. UC students have all the amenities that modern students expect, but they enjoy partaking of them in world class architectural achievements, which is a big part of why Cincinnati takes our top spot.

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